

A.2 Project Description - ICPSR

Four major American Social Science data archives, together with the electronic records custodial division of the National Archives and Records Administration, will come together to create a partnership that will identify, appraise, acquire, catalog, and preserve data used for social science research. The results of this project will ensure the long-term preservation of the vital heritage of digital material that allows our nation to understand itself, its social organization, and its policies and politics. Starting with the 1890 U.S. Census, data used for social, economic, and political research were the first materials to be converted to digital format for analysis by computer technology. Despite more than a half-century of aggressive archival efforts, not all historically valuable digital social science research content has been preserved. Led by the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan, this project brings together units of Harvard University and the Universities of Connecticut and North Carolina, together with the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, in building a broad-based acquisition and preservation partnership. The result will be a substantial increase in the amount of digital content that is preserved and made available for future research and study. The project will undertake activities in each of the four required areas: Content Identification and Selection. The partners will survey important research in the social sciences, as well as other sources of information about potential acquisitions, and identify content that should be preserved. This will include publicly and privately produced digital content, with NARA concentrating on the domain of material produced by the U.S. government. With assistance from NARA, the partners will develop archival appraisal standards. Using those standards, the Identification team will appraise and classify the content identified, and select the most appropriate items for acquisition. Content Acquisition. Each archive will establish a budget and process for acquisition of content that is best suited for its own collection, with ICPSR both working towards its collection philosophy and serving as the backup for the acquisition of important items that don't fit other collections. Each archive will then acquire appropriate material. The archives will develop common standards for metadata preparation and catalog information, and use those standards in the acquisition process. Partnership Building. The partners will work together to establish common identification, appraisal, and acquisition policies and practices. They will create a common catalog and invite additional partners to join. They will enter into a joint retention/preservation agreement, which will include strategies for transferring content and include a common off-site backup strategy. The partners will work together and with the Library of Congress to develop long-term preservation and transfer policies. Content Retention/Transfer. The institutions that make up this partnership have long histories and secure long-term funding from their home institutions or other sources. They are well positioned to retain and preserve the content developed by this project. The partners will enter into an agreement at the outset that will describe a strategy for transferring content from one institution to another in the event that one of these institutions should no longer be able to retain the content, with ICPSR being the likely final repository of privately-created data, and NARA the final repository for publicly-created content. Copies of all material will also be given to the Library.